

SENATOR TOM DASCHLE DELIVERS REMARKS TO REPORTERS
JANUARY 15, 2003

DASCHLE: Well, welcome to the first dugout of the 108th Congress.

I want to talk about three things if I can today: The first is the Michigan case; the second is the omnibus appropriations bill; and third is the reorganization of the 108th Congress.

With regard to the Michigan case, this is a watershed moment for the administration. They have to decide whether they're for civil rights and diversity or not. That's the question. And whether or not they decide that will be known in the next couple of days, and I hope they make the right decision. This is a critical decision, as we contemplate Martin Luther King Day on Monday, as we consider the civil rights record of this administration, as we consider the rhetoric of the Senate Republican leadership.

Senator Frist noted on Sunday that while they want more dialogue, he didn't expect policies to change.

Well, that's disappointing. We need policies to change in this country, because it matters. It matters in the courts. It matters in promoting diversity. It matters with regard to the legislative priorities of this land, especially matters like hate crimes and matters involving giving equal opportunity to all Americans regardless of color. And so, I would hope that as the administration contemplates a decision, it recognizes the watershed nature of this case and their position.

With regard to the omnibus appropriations bill, we are coming to a point where I believe that we may be able to bring the bill up either later on this afternoon or tomorrow. I don't expect that we will likely finish this week, even though that would be my desire. I think that there are some very, very critical amendments.

Keep in mind, this is an appropriations bill that will include 11 appropriations bills. So if you can just imagine putting 11 appropriations bills and offering senators the right to amend, that would generate a good deal of attention and a good deal of interest and probably a flurry of amendments.

We have met in our caucus, and we've met in leadership. And we have laid out some priorities here that we are going to be very interested in offering.

Our first will homeland or hometown security. Senator Byrd will be offering an amendment for about \$5 billion that will give the president the resources he needs to do the job. He, as you recall, refused to spend \$2.5 billion on hometown security last year. He refused to commit those resources at the very time when states and localities were saying, "We are vulnerable."

And we will continue to try to finalize an agreement with a hope and an expectation that perhaps we could finish it today.

Our position has not changed. And I believe that we can accommodate a new resolution and move on with the process.

But I'll simply say what I've said many, many times:

What's good enough for the 107th Congress at 51-49 is what's good enough for the 108th Congress. And I have every hope that we can adopt that approach and practice and move on to other matters.

So with that I'll take your questions.

QUESTION: In terms of this watershed moment, I mean, you say that the administration has to decide whether or not they're in favor of civil rights and diversity or not. Can't there be honest disagreements about racial preferences? I mean, can't you be opposed to racial preferences, like the University of Michigan, and still be in favor of civil rights?

And as far as diversity, the president says he's for this affirmative access program that they say has resulted in diversity where it's been tried. What do you say to that?

DASCHLE: There is a huge difference between talk and action. We've heard a lot of rhetoric from the administration. We've heard a lot of new phrases. Those phrases don't mean much if it doesn't give minorities more of an opportunity. Those phrases have nothing to do with the day-to-day action that is required of the federal government to ensure that what we say is what we mean by our acts. And that, I think, is the concern for most of us. They're talking--they're not acting.

QUESTION: So you cannot oppose this policy and also be in favor of civil rights?

DASCHLE: I don't think you can oppose this--I think the burden of proof will be on the administration, I think the burden of proof will be on Republicans to show us how they can be for diversity and yet be against the laws that promulgate diversity. That, I think, is a hard case to make, but I look forward to their response.

That's why I say, this is a watershed moment. They will have a choice. They have to decide whether they're for civil rights and diversity or not. And I believe this watershed moment is one that will say a lot about the true intent of the administration and our Republican colleagues.

QUESTION: Senator, in view of the preparations, do you have regrets about passing the Iraq bill in the fall the way you did? I mean, would you do it again the same way?

DASCHLE: I have no regrets because of the conditions that we put into the resolution.

What I have a regret about is that they are not upholding their end of the deal. They are not upholding their end and their responsibilities under that resolution. Their responsibilities were to consult with Congress. Their responsibilities included ensuring that we got the report. And so far I have not seen that. And I believe that it has to be rectified.

QUESTION: Sir, on economics, the stimulus, the growth, the Republicans, as you may have heard, are leaning towards doing (inaudible) bill and a reconciliation bill that the budget resolution would authorize, and that way they would need only a simple majority to pass it in the Senate. But on your side, Senators Byrd, Conrad and others oppose using the reconciliation process for tax cuts.

If that's the case, how would you put a Democratic alternative forward? Would you attempt to do an amendment to their bill? Do you find some other way to put whatever you produce forward? What would be the Democratic strategy on economic stimulus?

DASCHLE: Well, we will have an alternative. And it'll have five components. It must be immediate. We believe that, secondly, it ought to be limited to one year; third, that it ought to be targeted to the middle class; fourth, that it ought to be fiscally responsible; and fifth, that it ought to help the states. Those five criteria will be part of the Democratic alternative.

Now, we have begun the consultation and the drafting of this alternative. But we wanted to wait until we get closer to the debate itself to unveil it and ensure that we have the consensus that I know is achievable, given the unanimity with which Democrats embrace those principals.

I would be terribly disappointed if the Republicans locked us out of the opportunity to present the alternative. And should that happen, we will do everything we can to find alternative ways with which to ensure that that approach, that alternative, is considered. We would even consider, I think, not providing our Republican friends with the opportunity to move forward on anything else until we've had the chance to present the alternative. So we will consider our leverage and consider our timing, but we'll take first things first.

DASCHLE: That this is a local issue as much as it is a national issue. The hometowns of America I think are feeling especially concerned about protection of infrastructure, protection of water, protection of railroads and bridges and ports.

And I think the point we want to make is "homeland" has a generic sort of general sense about it; "hometown" has much more of a specific perception that I think articulates more precisely the concern that we have about what role this new agency should be performing; that is, protecting the hometowns of America.

QUESTION: On reorganizing, you've already got the size of the committees, the membership of the committees all made up. Presumably, the only thing left on the table is funding, just how you slice that pie up, or...

DASCHLE: No, there are several. Funding. Space.

QUESTION: Space is still...

DASCHLE: Space, I think--well, I don't know that it's--nothing's resolved, of course, until everything's resolved. But space, funding, the Intelligence Committee, staffing--those issues are still outstanding. But as I say, I'm satisfied that we're making progress and hopefully can announce some resolution to this negotiation before the end of the day.

QUESTION: And you have to do it all--you want all of this to be wrapped up...

DASCHLE: Oh, absolutely.

QUESTION: ... just in this resolution, you couldn't put off the Intelligence...

DASCHLE: Well, I said to some of you yesterday, what I wanted to do is to--a lot of this is too specific to put into the resolution itself. So my expectation is that we're going to reference--we will put it in the form of an agreement and we will reference that agreement in the resolution itself. We've done that in the past and that would be most likely the format for this agreement as well.

QUESTION: Is the president OK with that?

DASCHLE: Yes.

DASCHLE: You know, it's funny, our Republican friends say that frequently, but they don't miss a beat when it comes to committing the resources necessary to do the job that they think is necessary in defense, in protecting our country, and I think that that is understandable. We support the efforts that they have made to ask for more resources to defend our country and to fight the war on terror. And yet, we find when it comes to education and health care and energy and all of the issues that are true investments in this country, they argue, "Well, you don't really need all the resources. You can still do a good job." Well, you can't have it both ways. If you need the resources to defend our nation, I think you need the resources to make it stronger as we have proposed through better education and better health care.

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

DASCHLE: The first amendment will be about \$6 billion, and this one will be \$1.5 billion.

QUESTION: The two Republican chairmen in the House and Senate Budget Committees have nominated and put forward the name of Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the chief economist of the administration's Council of Economic Advisers, to replace Dan Crippen as head of the CBO. Do you have any misgivings about somebody coming from the administration to head up the independent Congressional Budget Office? And if so, what are (OFF-MIKE)

DASCHLE: Well, I have misgivings, first, in terms of their independence and, secondly, in terms of their philosophy. I understand he's an advocate of dynamic scoring, which I think is fantasy land scoring. I think it's nuts, and I don't think that it's appropriate for a CBO director. But, you know, we'll have an opportunity to hear more about his positions and his qualifications as time goes on.
Thanks everyone.

QUESTION: What affirmative action reform would you support, Senator Daschle?

DASCHLE: Well, we'll get into a lot of the specifics in the days ahead.

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